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SUBJECT: AUTHORITIES DENY OPPOSITION PERMISSION FOR JULY 27
CONCERT

Summary

¶1. (U) Minsk authorities denied the opposition coalition permission to stage a concert on July 27 in celebration of Belarus' 1990 independence from the Soviet Union. Organizers will appeal the decision and continue with plans to hold a meeting at Independence Square and a poetry reading at Yanka Kupala Park. However, without the concert, participation will likely be minimal. End summary.

Authorities Deny Permission

¶2. (U) Minsk city authorities on July 20 denied the United Democratic Forces (UDF) permission to stage a concert at Bangalore Park on July 27 to mark Belarus' independence from the Soviet Union. On July 27, 1990 Belarus adopted the State Sovereignty Declaration. Belarusians celebrated the date as Independence Day until 1996, when Lukashenko -- after expanding his powers -- removed Belarusian pre-revolution national symbols and holidays and replaced them with their Soviet-era counterparts.

¶3. (SBU) Lead organizer of the concert and Belarusian National Front (BNF) Deputy Viktor Ivashkevich told Poloff on July 23 that the authorities denied the UDF permission because the city had allegedly commenced preparing Bangalore Park for Minsk City Day celebrations in September. However, according to Belarusian legislation authorities are required to provide the UDF another location for the concert, which they failed to do. Therefore, Ivashkevich and his fellow July 27 organizer and Belarusian Social Democrat Party Gramada (BSDPG) (jailed presidential candidate Aleksandr Kozulin's party) Deputy Igor Rynkevich would draft a complaint and appeal the authorities' decision.

UDF Plans Forge Ahead

¶4. (SBU) Ivashkevich maintained that although the concert was now cancelled, other UDF plans on July 27 would move forward. At 16:00 at Independence Square, former MPs who adopted the 1990 declaration will speak to young activists who were born after Belarus' independence. The UDF did not seek permission for the gathering as, according to Ivashkevich, there will be no speeches or politically charged slogans and banners.

¶5. (SBU) The second event will be at 17:00 at Yanka Kupala Park, where activists will gather -- also without GOB permission -- to read selections from Kupala's poetry and lay flowers at his monument. Ivashkevich stressed throughout the

discussion with Poloff that the UDF's meetings would not be protest demonstrations. At 18:00, event organizers will arrive at Bangalore Park to explain to uninformed activists that the concert was cancelled. Ivashkevich expects everything to be finished by 18:30.

Few Participating

¶ 6. (SBU) Ivashkevich predicted that no more than 200 people would participate in the meetings. All coalition parties pledged to take part in the preparations and execution of the July 27 festivities, but according to Ivashkevich, only the BNF, BSDPG, BSDP Narodnaya Gramada (Nikolai Statkevich's party), and the Belarusian Christian Democracy Party were active. When asked if the United Civic Party (UCP) or Belarusian Party of Communists (BPC) would participate, Ivashkevich shrugged and did not even know if UCP leader Anatoliy Lebedko, BPC leader Sergey Kalyakin, or For Freedom (FF) leader Aleksandr Milinkevich would attend. Organizers are distributing 10,000 leaflets advertising the meetings (and concert) and relying on internet portals and newspapers to spread the word.

Comment

¶ 7. (SBU) When July 27 preparations first began, the UDF was counting on the concert to draw the crowd and did not have an alternative plan should authorities deny permission. Now, with no venue for a concert, we expect the opposition's July 27 festivities to go largely unnoticed. However, we and EU missions plan to observe the events.

Stewart